1. (Currently Amended) A method, comprising:

   associating one or more characteristic values with each user of a plurality of users

   of an online trading community, the one or more characteristic values

   representing an individual rating associated with each user; and

   deriving one or more community ratings uniquely corresponding to a particular

   user by ~~utilizing~~ aggregating the one or more characteristic values

   associated with the particular user and the one or more characteristic

   values associated with each user of the plurality of users ~~related~~ sponsored

   to the online trading community ~~to~~ by the particular user ~~and the one or~~

   ~~more characteristic values associated with the particular user~~.

2. (Currently Amended) The method of claim 1, ~~further~~ wherein the online trading

   community comprises an electronic community to trade merchandise over a

   network, wherein the trading of the merchandise comprises at least one of buying

   or selling of goods or services.

3. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 2, wherein the network comprises the

   Internet.

4. (Currently Amended) The method of claim 1, wherein the one or more

   characteristic values comprise a feedback value based on feedback concerning the

   particular user received from other users of the plurality of users in the electronic

   community.

5. (Currently Amended) The method of claim 4, wherein the other users of the

   plurality of users comprise users that have previously traded ~~the merchandise~~ with

   the particular user.

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6.   (Currently Amended) The method of claim 1, further comprising -comprises maintaining a relationship tree between each user of the plurality of users, the relationship tree includes sponsorship relationships between the particular user and any users of the plurality of users that were sponsored by the particular user.

7.   (Previously Presented) The method of claim 6, wherein the sponsorship relationships of the plurality of users are represented as the relationship tree including one or more n-ary trees.

8.   (Previously Presented) The method of claim 6, wherein information concerning the sponsorship relationships between the plurality of users is stored in a data structure for each user of the plurality of users.

9.   (Original) The method of claim 8, wherein the data structure for the particular user contains a pointer to at least one user of the plurality of users that was sponsored by the particular user.

10.   (Previously Presented) The method of claim 1, wherein the deriving of the one or more community ratings for the particular user is performed utilizing a recursive routine.

11.   (Previously Presented) The method of claim 1, wherein the one or more community ratings and the one or more characteristic values comprise numerical values.

Claims 12-13 (Cancelled)

14.   (Currently Amended) A machine-readable medium having stored thereon data representing sets of instructions which, when executed by a machine, cause the machine to:

associate one or more characteristic values with each user of a plurality of users

of an online trading community, the one or more characteristic values

representing an individual rating associated with each user; and

derive one or more community ratings ~~for~~ uniquely corresponding to a particular

user by ~~utilizing~~ aggregating the one or more characteristic values

associated with the particular user and the one or more characteristic

values associated with each user of the plurality of users sponsored to the

online trading community by the particular user.

15.   (Currently Amended) The machine-readable medium of claim 14, ~~further~~

wherein the online trading community comprises an electronic community buying

and selling of merchandise over a network, the merchandise having at least one of

goods and services.

16.   (Previously Presented) The machine-readable medium of claim 15, wherein the

one or more characteristic values comprise a feedback value based on feedback

concerning the particular user received from other users of the plurality of users in

the electronic community.

17.   (Previously Presented) The machine-readable medium of claim 14, wherein the

sets of instructions which, when executed by the machine, further cause the

machine to maintain a relationship tree between each user of the plurality of users,

the relationship tree includes sponsorship relationships between the particular user

and any user of the plurality of users that were sponsored by the particular user.

Claims 18–20 (Cancelled)

21.   (Previously Presented) The method of claim 1, wherein the one or more

community ratings for the particular user represent a reputation value

corresponding to the particular user.

22. (Currently Amended) A method, comprising:

associating a first characteristic value with a first user of a plurality of users

within an ~~electronic~~ online trading community ~~for trading merchandise~~,

the first characteristic value being ~~is~~ obtained for the first user ~~by~~ utilizing

a first feedback value based on feedback received concerning the first user

from other users of the plurality of users;

associating a second characteristic value with a second user of the plurality of

users, wherein the second user is sponsored to the online trading

community by the first user, ~~and~~ the second characteristic value being ~~is~~

obtained for the second user ~~by~~ utilizing a second feedback value based on

feedback received concerning the second user from other users of the

plurality of users; and

deriving a first community rating for the first user by aggregating the first

characteristic value and the second characteristic value.

23.   (Currently Amended) The method of claim 22, further ~~comprises deriving a~~

~~second community rating for the second user by utilizing the second characteristic~~

~~value.~~ comprising:

associating a third characteristic value with a third user of the plurality of users,

wherein the third user is sponsored to the online trading community by the

second user, the third characteristic value is obtained for the third user by

utilizing a third feedback value based on feedback received concerning the

third user from other users of the plurality of users; and

deriving a second community rating for the second user by aggregating the second

characteristic value and the third characteristic value.

24.   (Currently Amended) The method of claim 22, further ~~comprises~~ comprising

maintaining a relationship tree between the first user and the second user of the

plurality of users, wherein the relationship tree comprises a sponsorship

relationship having the second user as a lineal descendent of the first user.

25.   (Currently Amended) The method of claim ~~22,~~ 23, further ~~comprises~~ing

maintaining a relationship tree between the second user and the third user of the

plurality of users, wherein the relationship tree comprises a sponsorship

relationship having the ~~second~~ third user as a lineal descendant of the ~~first~~ second

user.

26.   (Currently Amended) The method of claim ~~22,~~ 24, wherein the relationship tree

comprises a nexus between the first user, the second user, and other users

sponsored by at least one of the first user and the second user.

27.   (Previously Presented) The method of claim 22, wherein the first community

rating comprises first reputation value corresponding to the first user, and the

second community rating comprises second reputation value corresponding to the second user.

28. (Currently Amended) A machine-readable medium having stored thereon data representing sets of instructions which, when executed by a machine, cause the machine to:

associate a first characteristic value with a first user of a plurality of users within an ~~electronic~~ online trading community ~~for trading merchandise~~, the first characteristic value is obtained for the first user by utilizing a first feedback value based on feedback received concerning the first user from other users of the plurality of users;

associate a second characteristic value with a second user of the plurality of users, wherein the second user is sponsored to the online trading community by the first user, ~~and~~ the second characteristic value is obtained for the second user by utilizing a second feedback value based on feedback received concerning the second user from other users of the plurality of users; and

deriving a first community rating for the first user by aggregating the first characteristic value and the second characteristic value; ~~and~~

~~deriving a second community rating for the second user by utilizing the second characteristic value~~.

29. (Currently Amended) The machine-readable medium of claim 28, wherein the sets of instructions which, when executed by the machine, further cause the machine to maintain a relationship tree between the first user and the second user of the plurality of users, wherein the relationship tree comprises a sponsorship relationship having the second user as a lineal descendent of the first user.

30. (Cancelled)

31. (Previously Presented) The machine-readable medium of claim 28, wherein the relationship tree comprises a nexus between the first user, the second user, and other users sponsored by at least one of the first user and the second user.

32. (Previously Presented) The machine-readable medium of claim 28, wherein the first community rating comprises first reputation value corresponding to the first user, and the second community rating comprises second reputation value corresponding to the second user.

33. (Currently Amended) A system, comprising:

a first storage medium; and

a first computer coupled with the first storage medium, the first computer to associate one or more characteristic values with each user of a plurality of users

of an online trading community, the one or more characteristic values

representing an individual rating associated with each user, and

derive one or more community ratings for uniquely corresponding to a particular

user by utilizing aggregating the one or more characteristic values

associated with the particular user and the one or more characteristic

values associated with each user of the plurality of users sponsored to the

online trading community by the particular user.

34. (Previously Presented) The system of claim 33, further comprising:

a second storage medium; and

a second computer coupled with the second storage medium and the first

computer via a network interface, the second computer to

receive feedback concerning the particular user from other users of the plurality of

users,

generate a feedback value corresponding to the particular user based on the

feedback, and

transmit the feedback value to the first computer.

35.   (Currently Amended) The system of claim 34, wherein the first computer

comprises a server computer and the second computer comprises a <u>client</u>

<u>computer including</u> viewing computer.

36.   (Previously Presented) The system of claim 33, wherein the first computer is

further to maintain a relationship tree between each user of the plurality of users,

the relationship tree includes sponsorship relationships between the particular user

and any users of the plurality of users that were sponsored by the particular user.

37.   (Previously Presented) The system of claim 33, wherein the first computer is

further to determine the one or more characteristic values based on the feedback

value corresponding to the particular user.

38.   (Previously Presented) The system of claim 34, wherein the second computer is

accessed by the plurality of users to trade merchandise, wherein the trading of the

merchandise comprises buying or selling of goods or services.

39.   (Previously Presented) The system of claim 34, wherein the network interface is

to couple the first computer with the second computer over a network having the

Internet.

40.   (New) The machine-readable medium of claim 28, wherein the sets of instructions

which, when executed by the machine, further cause the machine to:

associate a third characteristic value with a third user of the plurality of users,

wherein the third user is sponsored to the online trading community by the

second user, the third characteristic value is obtained for the third user by utilizing a third feedback value based on feedback received concerning the third user from other users of the plurality of users; and

derive a second community rating for the second user by aggregating the second characteristic value and the third characteristic value.

41.   (New) The machine-readable medium of claim 40, wherein the sets of instructions which, when executed by the machine, further cause the machine to maintain a relationship tree between the second user and the third user of the plurality of users, wherein the relationship tree comprises a sponsorship relationship having the third user as a lineal descendent of the second user.